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My Father, Burke Davis



Angela Davis-Gardner

*Together with Proceedings of a Banquet on the Occasion of the Presentation
of the North Caroliniana Society Award for 1990*

NORTH CAROLINIANA SOCIETY IMPRINTS
NUMBER 20



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NORTH CAROLINIANA SOCIETY IMPRINTS

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by Angela Davis-Gardner

My Father, Burke Davis



Angela Davis-Gardner
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*Together with Proceedings of a Banquet on the Occasion of the Presentation
of the North Caroliniana Society Award for 1990*

Chapel Hill
NORTH CAROLINIANA SOCIETY, INC.
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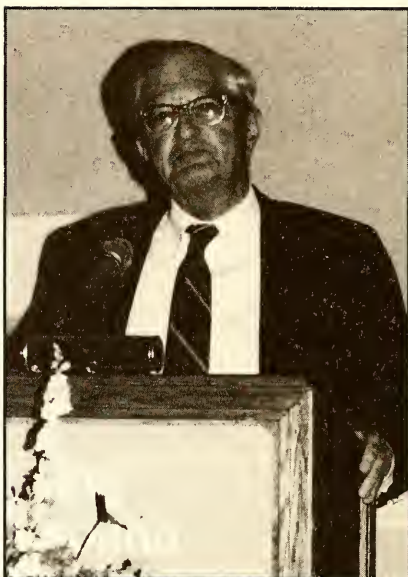
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AN EVENING WITH BURKE DAVIS

On the evening of Friday, 25 May 1990, in the Carolina Inn, Chapel Hill, friends and family joined in a reception and banquet honoring Burke Davis on the occasion of his acceptance of the North Caroliniana Society Award for 1990. The award recognized Mr. Davis for his contributions to the literature and culture of his native state. The master of ceremonies was H. G. Jones, curator of the North Carolina Collection and secretary-treasurer of the Society, and the award was presented by Archie K. Davis, president of the Society. Announced speakers were William D. Snider and William C. Friday, and the surprise main speaker was the recipient's daughter, novelist Angela Davis-Gardner. Their remarks, along with the response of the recipient, are published in this twentieth number of the North Caroliniana Society Imprints series.





Speakers for the Burke Davis banquet included (clockwise from top left) H.G. Jones, master of ceremonies; and William D. Snider, William C. Friday, and the recipient's novelist daughter, Angela Davis-Gardner.



At top President Archie K. Davis presents the North Caroliniana Society Award to Burke Davis. At bottom the recipient chats with an old friend, Charles M. Shaffer.



Burke Davis makes a point with Tom Perry and Judge Peter W. Hairston in top photo. At bottom he gets a point from Roy Wilder, Jr.



"She started it all," Burke Davis seems to be saying of Rena Cole Parks, his high school teacher of sixty years ago. At bottom he talks with Frances Garvey and newsman Ed Hodges.



Timothy B. Burnett, president of the Chancellors' Club and Davis's stepson, greets former Senator Thomas J. White, and at bottom Senator White poses with his wife Virginia. (All photos by Jerry Cotten, North Carolina Collection.)



Opening Remarks and Introductions

H. G. Jones

The name Walter Davis is quite familiar on the campus of the University of North Carolina. One Walter Davis became an All-American basketball player. Another gave so much money for our basketball emporium that the trustees named the new library after him. First things first, you know.

Tonight, though, we are interested in still another Walter Davis—the dark-haired Walter *Burke* Davis, Jr., whose handsome picture appeared on page 67 of the 1937 *Yackety-Yack*. The fact that he attended four colleges before getting his bachelor's degree suggests that we not pry too closely into those precocious years. Besides, how could we explain a Tar Heel who now so avidly roots for the Duke Blue Devils, even when they play in Chapel Hill?

We'll be hearing more about—and we hope from—that Walter Burke Davis. First, though, the obligatory introductions before dinner. May I ask each person at the head table to stand as his or her name is called, and remain standing until all have been introduced, and will the audience withhold applause until we come to the one who deserves it:

From my far right, Virginia Powell, William Friday, Flo Snider, Archie Davis, and Ida Friday; and from my far left, Bill Powell, Mary Louise Davis, and Bill Snider.

And now will you join in welcoming Juliet Davis and our North Carolinian Society Award recipient for 1990, Burke Davis.

All of the remainder in this room are special to Burke Davis, but may I recognize three special, special people: his novelist daughter, Angela Davis-Gardner, and his sisters, Virginia King and Marjorie Hulton. Finally, a special, special, special person who he says “ruin” him in high school by inspiring him to become a writer—his teacher of sixty years ago, Rena Cole Parks.

Now as we approach the entrée, may I explain that when almost exactly twenty-five years ago Burke Davis spoke to the Friends of the Library, probably in this very room, he quoted William Byrd's slander of North Carolinians: “. . . these People live so much upon Swine's flesh that it . . . makes them extremely Hoggish in their Temper, and many of them seem to Grunt rather than Speak . . .” Well, that's not why we are avoiding hog meat tonight; it's just that we couldn't afford it. Please enjoy your poultry.

[Dinner followed.]

We hope that Burke Davis is not superstitious, for he receives the *thirteenth* annual North Caroliniana Society Award, inaugurated in 1978 when we recognized Paul Green. Four of our previous recipients are with us tonight, and I'd like each to stand and remain standing until you can applaud all at the end: In alphabetical order, William McWhorter Cochrane, William and Ida Friday, William Powell—and, of course, Gladys Coates, who contributed so much to our second honoree, Albert Coates.

It's always a temptation at a gathering such as this to recognize individual guests, but I shall resist except to take one liberty: to express our delight in having in our midst a man who has served so profoundly our University and our state through his frankness in pointing out our shortcomings and his influence in overcoming them. Few men have contributed so much to, and no man loves his state more, than Senator Tom White, who, Burke, simply hiked up his broken hip and made a painful journey from Kinston just to be with you tonight.

Now for Burke Davis, a man of many talents, one of which will be a special focus tonight. His pen has ranged from blacks in the American Revolution to Chesty Puller in World War II; from the history of the Southern Railway to a scientific study of the king snake; from the biography of a leaf to the story of a pretty Confederate rabbit by the name of Roberta E. Lee. His books have won many awards, and at least one has been banned in Brooklyn. I remind him, however, that there is some unfinished business: He and Pete Ivey were the recognized specialists on the persimmon, a subject that deserves his analytical pen. Burke was probably a party to the story about a rural Methodist Church that ran out of grape juice for communion. One member rushed to the rescue with her two-year-old persimmon brandy. Neighboring Baptists spread the word that the congregation got so puckered up that they had to whistle the doxology.



Our first two speakers, both valued members of the Board of Directors of the North Caroliniana Society, share friendship and association with Burke Davis. William D. Snider, a native of Salisbury who served on the staffs of Governors Gregg Cherry and Kerr Scott, was for thirty-one years associate editor and editor of the *Greensboro Daily News*, a position that brought him into close contact with our recipient. Bill's history of his alma mater, the University of North Carolina, is eagerly awaited by all of us during these bicentennial years. Then, without further introduction, will follow a man who truly meets the classification of "needs no introduction to a North Carolina audience," former president of the University of North Carolina and now president of the William R. Kenan, Jr., Trust, William C. Friday.

[The remarks of Messrs. Snider and Friday are printed later.]

It is rather strange that, while most of the people at the head table and half of those in the audience are working on books, Burke Davis is not. Still, knowing that many of you could throw light upon the career of Burke Davis, we chose *another* writer. But which one? All of us have read biographical articles *about* and reviews of books *by* Burke Davis, but they all concentrated on his public side, the side that many know so well. What about the *real* Burke Davis? The one behind the pen? Happily, literary talent and close observation are combined in one of those joining to honor Burke tonight. Please welcome a teacher of creative writing at North Carolina State University, author of the critically acclaimed novel *Felice*, who is just finishing a new book for Random House, Burke's daughter, Angela Davis-Gardner.

[Angela Davis-Gardner's address is printed later.]

The name Archie Davis is as familiar on this campus as is the name *Walter* Davis. Look through the directories. From 1928 to 1932, there was Archibald Kimbrough Davis. From 1960 to 1964 there was Archibald Hilliard Davis, a son. The 1990 directory lists Archibald Kimbrough Davis II, a grandson. But look again: there is also simply Archibald Kimbrough Davis, with no suffix. Ladies and gentlemen, the president of the North Caroliniana Society, who is not satisfied with three degrees from UNC, our perpetual student, Archie Davis.

[President Davis's remarks are printed later.]





The Burke Davis I Know

William D. Snider

It's well known in my business—the newspaper business—that some of our brightest stars got their start as sports writers. It happened to James Reston of the *New York Times* and it happened to Burke Davis. Burke began his professional career as a sports writer for the old *Charlotte News* (God bless its soul). He always said sports writing was freer and looser than regular writing. And anybody who knows Burke knows he was always free and loose.

But before his *Charlotte News* days Burke had an interesting encounter with education at the old Woman's College in Greensboro during the mid-1930s. The Woman's College occasionally accepted male students in those days, and Burke was among a handful of Greensboro boys who enrolled. One of his classmates, the prominent Greensboro lawyer Charlie Hagan, remembered the best WC story on Burke which he told recently at their 50th high school class reunion.

Burke had a rather undistinguished career at WC—he was a little too free and loose—and Chancellor Julius Faust finally suggested that he might do better elsewhere. But before dropping out, Burke, who was interested in dramatics, signed up for one of the college's theatrical productions. It was the famous Sir James Barry play called "The Old Woman Shows Her Medals." Burke played the role of a young Scottish soldier who struck up a friendship with an old woman whose son had been killed in World War I and who invited him out to her cottage to see her son's medals. The old woman was charmed by Burke, and really thought she might like to adopt him. At one point in the conversation Burke, all dressed up in his Scottish kilts, sat down in a chair and turned to the old woman and asked her: "Well, now that you've seen me, how do you like me?" Whereupon a great roar of laughter arose from the audience assembled in Aycok Auditorium. Burke was wearing his kilts, but he'd forgotten his underpants.

Burke left Woman's College as a rather celebrated student, you can be sure. He went on to fiddle around at Guilford College and Duke, then ended up getting a journalism degree at Chapel Hill, where he ran into such characters as Skipper Coffin, Phillips Russell, and Walter Spearman. Burke felt right at

home down there among those authentic Tar Heels. Burke, as most of you know, spent a good deal of his later career in Virginia, but he never lost his North Carolina spirit. Old Colonel William Byrd used to say that North Carolina was an uncivilized land populated only by third and fourth sons from Virginia, escaped convicts, and ne'er-do-wells. But Burke knew that wasn't true. Virginia didn't spoil him one bit. "I love Virginia," he once said. "But there's something different about North Carolina from any place I've ever seen. I don't know whether it's more democracy or what, but they just don't put on much 'side'" in North Carolina.

That's the secret of Burke Davis and North Carolina. Neither of them puts on much "side."

I got to know Burke when Miles Wolff, Sr., hired him in the 1950s to come work as a "special writer" on the old *Greensboro Daily News* (again bless its soul). Burke and his first wife, Evangeline, and their two children, moved into the old Hoskins House at Guilford Battleground National Park. That was, and is, a famous structure. It served as Lord Cornwallis's headquarters during the Battle of Guilford Courthouse. Today, by some miracle, it's been preserved and restored, standing on a hill beside Battleground Road flanked by too many 20th century condos.

Back in the old days the Hoskins House sat on a hillside meadow with a clay tennis court built by the Davises standing beside it. Burke and Evangeline called it "Cornwallis House." Burke did much of his early writing in the loft. It was an altogether fitting place to begin writing about the Revolutionary War.

I hardly need to tell you, his friends, that Burke is a woodsman, a gardener, a birdwatcher, a woodchopper. He loves the land, but he loves writing even better. His aim, he once said, is to "make history as exciting as fiction." He has succeeded. He is also a prankster. Edward Cone, now a noted composer and professor of music at Princeton, remembers "W.B." Davis tying up his socks in terrible knots and dipping them in the lake while they were swimming at Camp Graystone. Rena Parks, his old Greensboro High School English teacher, remembers him leaning out the window one day and saying: "Hurry, teacher, I brung you something." What he had brung was a snake, which they tucked away in a wastebasket covered with a weighted-down poster. Rena Parks became one of Burke's favorite teachers. When she wrote that she'd seen his by-line in the *Charlotte News*, Burke wrote back with that keen Davis humor: "If you hadn't ruint me in them days, I wouldn't be in this racket."

Some friends and I tried to analyze Burke's work habits when he was a reporter for the *Greensboro Daily News*. Unlike most of his contemporaries, he used a large yellow legal-sized pad. When he was sent to cover major stories

—like the multiple murder in Yanceyville or the Junius Scales trial in Greensboro —he would take copious notes. Then he would return to the office and pound out a 2,000 or 3,000 word story in about 40 minutes. Burke had a great ear for the language. Usually he let his witnesses or his interviewees tell the story in their own words. His prose was simple and down to earth, never pretentious or boring. Your eyes never glazed over when you read Burke Davis copy. It sparkled. Burke said his writing looked easy, but it wasn't. It was hard work.

What about Burke as a personality? He was a strange one. People used to say Burke was always disappearing. If you ever saw him at a social gathering, he would be backed off in a corner or up against a banister somewhere out in the hall—a six-foot-four figure with a shock of dark hair and a look of discomfort on his face. He just didn't like *that* kind of socializing. Too much “side.” Oh, you could get him engaged in small talk sometimes—if it was on the right subject. He liked dogs and children. Burke's sense of humor was sly and unexpected. One of my associates at the *Daily News* traveled one day with Burke to Haw River to visit Governor Kerr Scott and talk about his road paving program. There was a scandal brewing because Scott's highway commissioner had been remiss about getting some of those farm-to-market roads around Scott's farm paved. The highway engineers had built a tunnel under part of what became Interstate 85 to get Governor Scott's cows back and forth to their pastures—but when that hit the press, they decided to close it. I would love to have heard Kerr Scott and Burke Davis talking about cows down there among the red clay and sassafras of Alamance County. Burke wrote a pungent series of articles about North Carolina's great roadbuilding governor. He didn't like “side” either. Burke always covered the General Assembly when it was in session at Raleigh, and his stories from behind the scenes were superb.

Because Burke was inclined to avoid small talk and sometimes disappeared, he wasn't “one of the boys” around the newsroom. He didn't hang around after the writing was done. Some thought he was uppity. But Burke was really kind of shy. He marched to his own drummer. He was quiet and sharply observant around other people. That was part of his interviewing technique. I remember a story told by one of the Richardson sisters in Greensboro, a member of the old Vick Chemical Company family. Dora had married a diplomat and they returned to Greensboro for a visit from a sensitive foreign country. The *Daily News* sent Burke to interview him. According to Dora, Burke didn't say much or even ask many questions. In fact, he was so quiet that Jim Lowenstein and his wife felt the urge to make conversation. Afterwards Dora told her husband, “Jim, you really shouldn't have told Burke all those things. You talked too much.”

But that was the way Burke affected people. They really liked to talk to him.

Burke once said that he noticed that Douglas Southall Freeman, the great biographer of Lee, often put some of his best stories in his footnotes. Burke did that too. But despite the fame of his Civil War books, Burke's favorite among his own works is *The Summer Land*, his reminiscence about visiting his grandfather's farm in Yadkin County. That's where Burke learned about the lore of the land. He's been listening to tales all his life. Although Burke says he's through with writing, I hope he'll work on that manuscript about country fox hunting that he has squirreled away in his and Judy's lovely summer house on the Blue Ridge Parkway. Judy Davis, by the way, has been Burke's joy and inspiration. She helped him conquer the computer in writing some of his latest books. Juliet Haliburton Burnett Davis, bless her soul, is a beautiful, intelligent, and utterly charming woman. She knows precisely how to bring out Burke's best qualities.

Burke has written some splendid children's books. I wish he would tell us the story of his two German shepherds named Fax and Cassie. Perhaps he will. Right now we're lucky that North Carolina has produced such an interesting example of what the Tar Heel motto was talking about when it proclaimed "To Be, Rather Than To Seem." Burke Davis is genuine and authentic Tar Heel right down to the bone. It's a pleasure to honor him.





Burke Davis, Writer

William C. Friday

Burke Davis's importance to this state might be expressed in many ways. Like James Reston he was a readable sports writer in his earlier years. Being involved with an afternoon paper in Charlotte, he had to be innovative to compete with Jake Wade, Dick Herbert, and Laurence Leonard; and he introduced the effective use of action photographs in sports, now essential to any successful paper.

He also pioneered in the post-game interview of athletes and coaches, a practice that has now grown to conversation before, during, and after games and all week long.

In sports as in everything he did, Burke sought the different, the interesting, the more revealing, the truthful story. He made reading his sports columns interesting because you knew you would be entertained as well as informed.

I first got to know Burke when he moved into the world of public affairs and political reporting. It was during the '50s—a rather turbulent time in the state with the beginnings of the Research Triangle, severe economic stress upon the state, post-World War II expansion in the University, the emergence of the Community College System, and the struggle to give life to the creative and performing arts in North Carolina.

Burke was very successful as a reporter of public affairs because he had a sense of humor and found much of a humorous nature when he wrote about the "Honorables" in the General Assembly. He was there during a great era of North Carolina political history—Joe Hunt, Wilburt Forbes, John Wesley Umstead, Archie Davis, Wayland Spruill, Luther Hodges, Thomas Jackson White.

I recently asked Senator White for his personal reminiscence of our distinguished guest:

"Tom, what do you recall and relish about Burke Davis?"

Answer: "One of two newspapermen for whom I have any respect at all."

Question: "Who was the other?"

Answer: "I don't remember."

Burke, you still rank Number 1.

Ed Rankin shares the judgment that Burke really introduced investigative reporting to North Carolina journalism. Not the scandal sheets on supermarket stands, but solid, hard-nosed examination and reporting of any violation of public trust or of trespass upon the public interest. For example, Burke's exposé of the building by a certain governor of a few miles of asphalt road up to and around his church. When the governor next saw Burke he expressed his indignation and astonishment at Burke's piece by saying, "What's the matter with you? Can't you see I stole it for the church?"

Much to the delight, joy, and enlightenment of all of us Burke remained and is today an established and accomplished historian at home with the careers of Jackson, Lee, Stuart, Sherman, Johnston. His books have nourished each of us and continue to stimulate our thinking about the most crucial period in the history of our country.

Whether he is in Charlotte, Raleigh, Greensboro, Williamsburg, or the Meadows on the Dan, this engaging and stimulating companion always inspires us to higher achievement and greater understanding of the importance of investing of ourselves in the growth and advancement of the commonwealth.

Burke, your writings in the earlier years reflected the joy you had in poking fun and keeping us all aware of the essentialness of humor and of not taking ourselves too seriously. As our teacher of history, you gave new meaning to words like valor, sacrifice, courage, and uncommon devotion. As our friend and fellow student, you have taught us that integrity, the public trust, and an element of fearlessness are the hallmarks of leadership so vital to the ongoing of our way of living and doing things.

So, Burke, it is a joy to be a part of this celebration of your life and your splendid and substantial contribution of the lives of each of us.

And remember, Burke, as Tom White said, we don't remember that other fellow; you are Number 1!





My Father Burke Davis: “Reality in Its Most Lively Sense”

Angela Davis-Gardner

As a child of historian Burke Davis, I grew up with the campaigns of the Revolutionary and Civil Wars at least as real to me as the events of our own time. Critics have praised my father not only for the accuracy of his biographies and histories but also for the vividness and dramatic detail with which they are told. Of *Grey Fox*, his biography of Robert E. Lee, one reviewer wrote, “It is as if you were *there*.” As Burke Davis’s family, we were there too—much of the time. As many of you in the audience are perhaps aware, Burke Davis can be a spellbinding storyteller in person as well as on the page; as his child I had the good fortune to hear these stories, and to learn about history in a way few people ever do. I was also, I realize now, witnessing the mind of a writer at work. Particularly when he was in the grip of whatever battle, period, or figure he was working on—and especially, it seemed, when we had company—my father entertained us at dinner with dramatic recountings of campaigns and battles—almost always including the shenanigans (these could be hilarious, or sobering, but were always fascinating) of the human beings involved. When I think of a battlefield I see a table set for dinner, with knives and salt cellars as trenches, battlements, a particular clump of trees—and a fork or knife moving across the tablecloth as an advancing enemy line.

As a child I may have had the battles of two wars confused in my mind, but this is understandable—for during the years we lived in the cabin that was Cornwallis’s headquarters during the Battle of Guilford Courthouse, my father was writing not only about the Revolution but also about Stonewall Jackson, Robert E. Lee, and Jeb Stuart, as well as my favorite character at the time, Roberta E. Lee, the Confederate rabbit who lived in Barefoot County, North Carolina, “. . . where it always seems to be about 10 o’clock on a warm Saturday morning with school let out, with BOTH strawberry time and pumpkin pie time coming in . . . ”

When my six-year-old son asks me to tell what I did when I was “six and up,” what I talk about most often are the adventures my father organized

and inspired when we lived in that 18th century house that has now been—to my eternal gratitude—preserved by the citizens of Greensboro. I tell my son how we found that house, how my father drove us through the countryside one afternoon and by uncanny coincidence found for sale a funny little white house that turned out to be—beneath the clapboard and in spite of the picture window—the cabin he'd already written about in *The Ragged Ones*. I tell him about the wonderful times my father and brother and I had playing fox and hounds in the snow all over the Guilford Battlefield—always pausing to greet General Greene on his horse—and then on the way home, sending telepathic messages to my mother to have cocoa ready. I tell my son about my brother and me riding our own pony along those roads where Greene's ragged band fought the redcoats—and how, during those pony rides, a retinue of dogs followed behind Blackie, and my patient, watchful father rode alongside in the car.

Living in that house with my imaginative historian father was an experience I think of as Proustian. There we were, recreating in our minds—with my father's help—that vivid and terrible scene enacted by our house some 170 years before, while at the same time our own histories were beginning imperceptibly to mingle with that other history. We swam in a pond whose source was Horsepen Creek, where the British were first fired upon; we dug for buttons and grapeshot in the yard beneath our Pawleys Island hammock. There was discussion about where the Scottish soldiers were buried—the slight depression beneath a maple tree near the drive always looked suspicious to me, but my father thought the graves were in the side yard beneath the tennis court. My father told us that Cornwallis had probably sat in front of this—OUR—fireplace, nursing his wounded arm and brooding over his awful decision to fire upon his own men—a decision that won him the battle but perhaps cost him the war. On the floor of my loft bedroom there were—or so I imagined—bloodstains from the wounded soldiers quartered there; while this did not occasion, that I recall, bad dreams, it did give me excellent material—when my friends spent the night—for ghost stories about those soldiers buried in the yard, and about Cornwallis, who returned to the scene of his crime one night a year at midnight—always on THIS particular night.

When we first lived in what we called Cornwallis House, my father worked in a small office at the Battlefield Museum; later, after a bedroom wing had been added to the house for me and my brother, his office was in the loft. I liked to go there and see hanging on the wall beside his desk (my father has a sense of humor quite unlike anyone else's!) the orthodontic cast of my teeth and my shorn braids. I also remember the stacks and stacks of yellowish news-

print paper he wrote on, and sound of his typewriter, often hammering away for hours at a time.

Thinking back on my father in those days, I realize I was aware quite early of his lively imagination, his memory, his discipline, and his prodigiously hard work. It amazed me even then—and it amazes me even more now that I know what it is to have adult responsibilities—that he wrote such an astonishing number of fine books, many of them when he was also putting in full days as a newspaperman, as well as giving so much time to his children.

I would like to tell you about Burke Davis the person from the perspective of being his child. Being raised by Burke Davis was enriching and fascinating, but not without its complications.

One of my father's highest accolades, when speaking of another person, is "He—or she—doesn't care whether school keeps or not." Certainly he didn't much care whether school kept, when he was a young man. To hear him tell it, he barely scraped through high school—thanks to Mrs. Rena Parks, who though his English teacher taught him enough French to pass his final exam—and was admitted to Duke only because they had a lot of empty beds in those depression years (though I have no doubt the admissions people saw promise in him too). As a Duke freshman he was in remedial English—though he didn't realize that for years; at the time he thought he was in advanced English. But he liked college—so much so that he attended four different institutions before he graduated from Chapel Hill with a journalism degree. A high point of his university career seems to have been at what was then Woman's College, where he was one of the first coeds.

As his children, my brother and I got mixed messages about school. *Faulkner* never put much stock in school—no writer any count ever did, according to my father. On the other hand, woe to the son or daughter who came home with less than straight A's! We certainly were not aware at the time of his own school record.

Yet I am sure that even during his years of indifferent scholarship, my father was learning a great deal about what truly interested him—snakes, for example. (An essay which his mother encouraged him to write about snakes when he was a teenager was apparently the beginning of his writing career—he even won an award for it.) School was not to be confused with knowing something, which I would say is my father's highest value, and one which he instilled in me early. I remember so clearly his telling me—and my taking this in—that the life of the mind is such pleasure in itself, and that having substantive material to think about would be a comfort to me the rest of my life.

What he has always rebelled against is rote learning, convention, anything

that stultifies the spirit. He said this at different times in different ways, but most of all, as I was growing up, he lived it.

Though a true gentleman, he has never let this seriously interfere with being himself. Not for him the wardrobe favored by fathers of my acquaintances when I was a teenager—the business suits, four in hand ties, and wing tip shoes. Always he wore bow ties (I suspect from the ragged condition of one or two of these, he still wears some from the 50s) and shoes that made me squirm, made-to-order moccasins that he said were the ultimate in comfort—but they looked to me like small kayaks with laces.

With his high spirits and imagination, he was also a lot more fun than other fathers. Driving down the road with me and my brother, he'd pick up an imaginary microphone and say—as though dispatching a message to a fleet of cars—"Calling all cows, calling all cows," and then go on with a monologue that could end anywhere. One place it often ended was at the dairy bar, where he'd ask, to my delight and chagrin, "What's the biggest banana split ever built in Guilford County? Well, this girl and boy each want one." On the way home he might sing an aria from his Dairy Bar Opera—an ongoing cycle—which would go something like, "Chocolate, do you want chocolate? No thank you, I'll have van-illa."

A memory I treasure now—though this was at the time excruciating—is when my father sent a telegram to my fifth grade classroom to let me know my dachshund had given birth. Actually, there was not just one telegram, but a series, as Gretel kept producing more and more offspring throughout the morning. My teacher—who should have loved this—was decidedly not amused as the telegram deliverer kept arriving at the door, interrupting our study of commas with the latest puppy count.

One Christmas or birthday when I was in high school my father gave me—elaborately wrapped in tissue and ribbon—a plain wooden board with the words Neese's Country Sausage burned into it. I don't know what this was—a display item perhaps, or part of a box—but I rose to the occasion by making no comment; on his next birthday, I wrapped it up for him. We gave that board back and forth to each other for years—always without a comment or a smile. It has not, alas, survived, but I wish it had so I could give it to him tonight.

As you would expect, Burke Davis has great respect for literature and language, and he passed that on to his children. Some of my happiest memories are of him reading to me when I was a little girl, and then reading myself the wonderful books he gave me for Christmas: *The Secret Garden*, *A Little Princess*, *The Five Little Peppers*. When I was only a sophomore in college he presented

me with the *Oxford English Dictionary*, all 13 volumes; I may have been the youngest person ever to be so endowed.

But even with language, he liked to break the rules. He can—and often does—talk backwards; to this day when I see a sign that says “Speed Limit” I think “Timil Deeps.” He was always making up his own words. I can remember a period of time when he and I used our own past tense—the rules were only slightly complicated, but baffling to others (this may have been the best part). We were breaking the rules; but we KNEW better.

Burke Davis is a man of strong passions.

He scorns store-bought tomatoes; has no use for movies or television (with the exceptions of Bill Friday’s program and certain sports events). On the rare occasions my brother and I were allowed to watch Hopalong Cassidy or the Lone Ranger at a neighbor’s apartment, my father would drive us crazy with, “Uh oh, kids, looks like the last chapter.” Games invented by other people bore him—though when I was a child we used to beg him to play because he made any game more fun by reinventing it. He used to hate travel—his fond wife has cured him of that now—but when I was young he couldn’t be persuaded to go much farther than the beach; visiting another country was out of the question. “I haven’t seen all of Guilford Township yet,” he would say. He sent me and my mother on a grand European tour when I was 16; in response to our giddy postcards home, he wrote us the following: “Oh, if you could be here and see this *place*. It is just drenched with history, and the *people*! So picturesque. I know it would thrill you to see them speeding down the little old highways in their big cars, driving on the right-hand side. And so few riding bikes to work. Here they call trams buses, and treacle, molasses, and a spanner, a wrench. Oh, if you could *be* with us in Center Grove Township. I *declare*.”

His enthusiasms are equally strong. He’s wild about the Duke basketball team (this is reflected in his car license plate, Large Blue—instead of Big Blue, which would be too predictable). And ice cream—by the half gallon—preferably homemade, preferably mango. Picnics: he is the most creative sandwich maker I’ve ever known, and the best picnic-place-finder. He loves—and is profoundly knowledgeable about—the natural world, in all its forms: plants, birds, animals, and the wild, untouched places. One of his greatest gifts to me was the way he introduced me to the natural world, from the first time we went camping and the skunks came, to showing me, as he paddled us in a canoe up Queens Creek in Virginia, the two different nests a marsh wren makes—the real one and the false one built to fool enemies.

Gardening has always been one of his keenest interests. He has had organic gardens for many years, in several different locations, and knows just about

everything—it always seemed to me—about all manner of flowers, herbs, plants, trees. His garden on the mountain ridge where he now spends much of his time would have to be seen to be believed. Every vegetable and fruit grown in the northern hemisphere must be represented in that garden. He also has extensive collections of other kinds of plants—including magnificent rows of peonies. He puts the same kind of intensity and thoroughness in his garden that he put in his books—though I gather it is purer pleasure than writing was for him.

I would like to end with some words from Burke Davis himself.

This is from a letter he wrote to me when I was in college; of all the advice he gave me about writing, this is my favorite:

“Don’t listen to too much Chopin! It softens the spirit, and gives you the oldmaid welfareworker complex. The finest vein in your whole peerless character is that one of incomparable meanness. I think it came down to you via me, from my daddy and to him from old Steve Davis your greatgreat, about whom I’ll try and tell you some day. . . . (Anyway,) grit your tiny pearly teeth and be MEAN. If you wish to be a writer, especially while to carry on the life of everyday citizenlady or housewife or teacher or preacher or whatever you’ll be, you must be as Common as Pig Tracks.”

This next letter was apparently in response to my description of sophomore angst. It begins, “Dear Fellow Patient,” and concludes with some lines I cherish: “Don’t be tempted to think that you’re likely to get out of balance because of this (loneliness). A penchant for supercleanliness, a compulsion for order, or a pressing sense of duty are even more likely to sink you than the ailment you describe. Don’t forget that the great pessimists, who understood the end futility of life, have been exactly those of highest spirits and most immortal vigor. They had to pass this threshold to get ahold of reality in its most lively sense.”

Finally I would like to read a short passage from *They Called Him Stonewall*.

Roosting on the fence in the early May sun, he was more scarecrow than man, an effigy from the hands of some rustic humorist of this hill country. He was a joke of some sort; otherwise he defied belief.

He sat, incongruously sucking a lemon, on the outskirts of the village of New Market, Virginia, this spring day of 1862, surrounded by his troops, who rested after a brief noon meal. Wry-faced and pensive, he dealt with his everlasting lemon, evidently oblivious to all else. . . .

Today he wore, as he had since anyone could remember, the old coat of a major, a grimy, dusty, threadbare and single-breasted survivor of the Mexican War, permanently wrinkled into the General's inelegant mold by its sixteen years of service. The most urbane of his officers could describe the General's cap only as "mangy." Now, as ever, it rode far down his nose, the visor all but touching the beard. The coat was stained with the rusty watermarks of years; everything about him seemed in disrepair. So awkwardly did he crouch on his fence that he created the impression that, if he should fall, he might clatter to earth in three or four sections.

I chose this passage—and there are dozens and dozens more equally as good—for the *life* in those precise, keenly observed details. The vividness of Burke Davis's writing is of a piece, I think, with his vivid apprehension of and engagement with the present world. In his writing and in his life, Burke Davis has always been "ahold of reality in its most lively sense."





Presentation of the Award

Archie K. Davis

Ladies and gentlemen, members and guests of the North Caroliniana Society: Our honored guest is richly deserving of the many accolades tendered him this evening. As author of fifty or more books, he has brought to light the characters and events of the American Revolution through more than a half dozen works; he has published biographies of such Americans as Amelia Earhart, Andrew Jackson, Thomas Jefferson, Billy Mitchell, "Chesty" Puller, and Elliot Springs—and, of all things, a biography of a leaf; and he has charmed both adults and children with his fiction, including the story of a rabbit by the name of Roberta E. Lee of Barefoot County, North Carolina. His name is already enshrined among those of the literary giants of our state.

But, in my opinion his most significant contributions have been to our understanding of the American Civil War, and it was our mutual interest in that tragic era that brought us together for the first time. It was in Greensboro, back in the fifties, when approximately fifteen Civil War buffs had gathered for the purpose of forming a North Carolina Civil War Roundtable. Few present knew one another, so the leader suggested that each rise and introduce himself. In due course, a long, lanky, laid-back fellow stood up and drawled: "My name is Burke Davis, and I'm the only man ever shot at by Stonewell Jackson's granddaughter." Most everyone laughed, but I didn't get the point. I had not read *They Called Him Stonewall*. Although I had known Mrs. Julia Jackson Christian Preston (Mrs. Edmund Randolph Preston) for years, she had never mentioned the matter to me.

Later, I learned the facts. *They Called Him Stonewall* was a fine book and widely acclaimed, but the author had mentioned quite pointedly some of Jackson's eccentricities, clearly indicating that the general was a hypochondriac. Unhappily, Burke had failed to reckon with the genetic reaction of a Jackson under fire. Mrs. Preston, in a flanking attack, moved swiftly to his rear, marshalled her big guns, and leveled a broadside in the form of a stinging rebuke that appeared in the public opinion column of one of North Carolina's leading newspapers. That was it. Burke had no choice but to withdraw across the river of remorse and seek reconciliation.

It has been long in coming. A friend of both, I have tried to play the role of peacemaker down through the years, and only recently has a dramatic breakthrough developed. Through the good offices of one of Mrs. Preston's daughters, whom I requested to get some idea about how her mother now regards that fellow "who called him Stonewall," I have obtained the following message, with Mrs. Preston's insistence that it be delivered verbatim:

In a recent conversation with Julia Jackson Christian Preston, now nearly 103 years old, she was asked if, at long last, she would exonerate Burke Davis? Her quick reply: "I'd rather die first!"

She was thinking back to the time when, after reading Burke's biography of her grandfather, she had been so infuriated that she blocked the sale of the book among U.D.C. members, and declared verbal war against the author.

But now: "As I get older," she said, "I'm softening. I appreciate Burke Davis' true literary greatness. His biography of my grandfather was one of the most imaginative and beautifully written pieces I've ever read. . . . His words and ideas had a zip to them. . . ." Then she added: "and may the Lord forgive me!"

"I'm mighty glad Burke is under the thumb of Arch Davis," she continued. "He can't get by with any fool tricks with Archie looking over his shoulder. Anybody Arch Davis is for, *I'm for* . . . with my fingers crossed."

At long last, peace has been restored and the big guns withdrawn. Would that Julia Jackson Christian Preston and the United Daughters of the Confederacy could join us this evening in paying tribute to our honored guest. The rafters would ring, for no one in this generation has done more to regenerate interest in *The Incredible Civil War* than our own Incredible Burke Davis.

Burke, we are all mighty proud of you, and, on behalf of the Society, it is now my high privilege and great personal pleasure to present to you the 1990 North Caroliniana Society Award, which reads as follows:

The North Caroliniana Society,
for distinguished contributions to the
literature and culture of his native state
presents its
North Caroliniana Society Award
to

BURKE DAVIS

May 25, 1990

[18]

Archie K. Davis
President

William S. Powell
Vice-President

H. G. Jones
Secretary-Treasurer



Acceptance of the Award

Burke Davis

Thank you, old friends Bill, Bill, Archie, my dear daughter, Dr. Jones, members of the North Caroliniana Society and friends.

Even in my heyday as the silver-tongued boy orator of Buffalo Creek Drainage District of Central Guilford County, N.C., I could not have made adequate response to you. How much less could I do so tonight, afflicted by increasing mental and physical infirmities?

I hope all of you can divine the depths of my gratitude for these kind remarks and this cherished honor.

Many old friends are here tonight, some of whom I have not seen for a very long time. Some of these friendships go back more than thirty years and one, as has been said, for sixty years—that with my high school English teacher, Mrs. Rena Cole Parks.

Many of you have led distinguished careers that have shed luster on the name of our state and contributed much to its progress—and have influenced the lives even of those less fortunate souls who live beyond our borders. As I look at you and realize that you now expect me to make some sensible response to what has gone before, I am somehow reminded of a story Lincoln liked to tell on himself.

He said that as he rode on a country road one day he met an old woman, also mounted, who reined in her horse, stared at him and said, “I declare, I think you’re the ugliest man I ever saw in my life.”

“Madam,” Lincoln replied, “that’s one thing I can’t do anything about.”

“You could stay home,” she said.

I was not about to stay home tonight, even if someone had told me that Archie Davis would survey my long conflict with Mrs. Preston over the personality and eccentric behavior of her grandfather. I am happy to learn that she has graciously called a truce. I’m afraid I was somewhat impertinent in this matter, for when I discovered that she had written to one or another Southern newspaper to condemn *They Called Him Stonewall*, I always wrote in my defense hoping, I suppose, to further the sale of the book.

This biography was not entirely without friends. In the only note I had from Dr. Louis Round Wilson he urged me, when he saw an announcement of the book's publication: "Don't change the title. Change anything else, but not the title." I'm glad to say that the title is still in print, these thirty-six years later.

I must report that Mrs. Preston brought plenty of firepower into our battle. In 1954 when that book was published, the United Daughters of the Confederacy held their convention in Richmond, where several speakers condemned me and *They Called Him Stonewall*. My mother, who was an ardent UDC as the daughter of a young Confederate soldier, sat mute—in quite uncharacteristic fashion—during these attacks. I suppose she hoped to escape notice as a relative of the blackguard who had sullied the name of one of the greatest Southern heroes.

But that was not the end of it. My publisher called to say that two little old ladies from Brooklyn had invaded his Manhattan offices, two spinsters who looked as if they had not been out of their houses since the turn of the century. They wore huge hats decorated with feathers—the wings of birds, as I recall—were heavily veiled and wore skirts which swept the floor. The one whose name I recall—Eulalie Bird-Mock—wore an ancient feather boa. These ladies solemnly announced to my editor and publisher that *They Called Him Stonewall* had been banned by the Brooklyn chapter of the UDC and that Rinehart & Co. must accept the consequences. What the consequences were I cannot recall but, as I said, the book remains in print.



I would like to recount two small incidents in the long, illustrious history of the University, as representative of the way in which Chapel Hill has touched the lives of countless thousands of families over two hundred years. One of these involves me, and the other, my wife, Judy, and her family.

Judy's grandfather, John Halliburton, was a senior here in the spring of 1861, when the Civil War was about to break upon the nation. He was a Unionist who opposed secession and the rush toward almost inevitable war. Halliburton made this clear in a series of striking letters to his cousin and sweetheart, Juliet Halliburton, who was at home in Arkansas. Her letters have

been lost but John's make it clear that there was a heated exchange over the issue of secession during several weeks of this spring.

The story had a not unexpected ending. John graduated and went home to Tennessee, where he quickly laid aside his Union sentiments and joined a Confederate cavalry company, the Haywood County Grays. He also soon married Juliet. Yet another sad tale of an American male who dreamed in vain of leading a life marked by independence of spirit.

John Halliburton's letters are now in the Southern Historical Collection of the University Library where, we are told, they shed new light on the attitudes of young men who were students here in that tragic spring of '61.

Of course, John was not merely Judy's grandfather. He was the great grandfather of her children who are here tonight—Miranda Miles, who lives in a beautiful ocean-front house at Wrightsville Beach, with all the clients she can handle, living the life any accountant might aspire to; and Judy's son, Tim Burnett, who was an eminent student here twenty-five years or so ago, a Morehead Scholar, a member of the Order of the Grail, and a record-setting advertising manager of the *Daily Tar Heel*, who was so successful that the editorial department of the paper had trouble in saying "Good morning" to its readers. Tim also married the Homecoming Queen of his senior year, Janie Allen, who could still defend her crown.

Allison, the beautiful daughter of Janie and Tim, now a junior here, carries on the tradition begun by John Halliburton one hundred thirty-four years ago, when he rode his horse from the banks of the Mississippi River across Tennessee and most of North Carolina, threading through the terrible Chapel Hill traffic to matriculate at the University.

The second incident—a less significant one—took place forty-four years ago almost to the day, here in the Carolina Inn. For this is where my so-called literary career began—in the old lobby of the Inn. A New York editor, hard pressed to find manuscripts at the end of the war, was hunting in Chapel Hill and had been told by Phillips Russell that I had a completed book. I had none but said I had an idea. The editor asked me to tell him about it, and for fifteen or twenty minutes I outlined for him my story—or rather, my friend Harry Golden's story, one which he had told me in great detail. It was the story of a Jewish merchant from the North who had come to Charlotte, changed his name and passed himself as a Gentile, then won his way to fortune over a long career. Golden gave me the complete picture—the psychology of the protagonist, the attitudes of the town's Jewish families as well as the Gentiles—both of whom saw through this man's charade.

It was all there—the only missing ingredient was an experienced—or a capable—novelist. I accepted a few hundred dollars from the publisher and took off two weeks to write in a cabin in the mountains near Little Switzerland. I was naive enough to take along several novels which had impressed me, some by Thomas Wolfe and Hemingway and *Ulysses* by James Joyce. I wrote as hard as I could all day and read those novels late into the night, hoping that some of the sophistication and spirit of those books would somehow rub off on me and become part of my text. It didn't happen, of course, but I did write a sample that convinced Rinehart to publish my first novel *Whisper My Name* in 1949, and I was at least on my way, though the novel was not much of a success.

If I were to be classified I suppose I would be put down as an instinctive, or intuitive, writer, as opposed to one who has been more carefully schooled in English composition, psychology, and research techniques.

This is a roundabout way of saying that I didn't know what I was doing when I began—a condition that endured for a good many years. I would like to cite a couple of examples.

When I was a Duke sophomore I was delighted when the English Department itself assigned me to one of those high-numbered courses—301 or some such—and I found myself in a night class with some juniors and seniors, among them some prom trotters and lounge lizards of my acquaintance. My suspicions were not aroused even by our use of an old-fashioned work book of the kind I had known in my early high school years—full of such horrors as diagrams for sentences. I passed the course with a high grade and the professor was the first person to tell me I might be able to write professionally.

It was long afterward, when I went back for the 25th reunion of my class, before I learned from that professor that the course in which I had taken such pride was actually one in remedial English.

The same pattern of accidental progress and semiconscious behavior marked much of my career. I came to Chapel Hill because I thought I wanted to be a New York advertising man and had been told that I needed a degree in journalism. So I came for my senior year, to the wonderful two-man School of Journalism made up of Skipper Coffin and Walter Spearman. We got along well. Among my sins of that year were some sports stories I wrote for the *Daily Tar Heel*. One of them ended my advertising career before it had begun and plunged me into journalism. Carolina was playing some dread foe in baseball, Georgia, I believe it was, and the Heels were leading by three or four runs in the ninth inning when the enemy began to put men on base. An enormous batter came up and hit the ball like a riflshot past third base—a fair ball which

then curved foul far to the left of left field. Six or eight dogs were playing out there in the weeds—in those days there were more dogs than young men enrolled in the University.

The kid who was playing left field gave a shrill whistle, and one of those dogs seized the ball and flew onto the playing field with it. The left fielder then threw home and caught the big Georgia batter as he attempted to slide. The catcher tagged him out and Carolina won the game. It caused quite a lively discussion around the umpire, so my story for the *Daily Tar Heel* was, of course, the story of the left fielder and his dog—I believe this especially shaggy assistant fielder was known as Rubinoff—and I revealed the actual score of the game only in the final sentence.

Walter Spearman liked the story and sent a copy to the *Charlotte News*, which was in need of a sports writer and the *News* liked it too. I was summoned to Charlotte for an interview, where the managing editor told me I was hired—for \$20 a week. I protested that I had paid soda jerks \$27 a week the year before when I was running a little soda shop in Greensboro. “Too bad,” he said, “\$20 is the most we’ve ever paid a cub reporter. You’ll have to take it or leave it.”

I took it, and though I knew literally nothing about sports, my new career had begun. I operated from a base of sheer ignorance which proved to have certain advantages. With neither dignity nor reputation at stake I asked players, coaches, and managers the most basic, elementary questions you can imagine—and surprisingly enough, I got answers which were so revealing and interesting that even the readers of the paper seemed to enjoy them. It appeared that the inside details I wanted to know were what they wanted to know, as well.

And those were great days for a young sports writer. The first bowl teams of the Carolinas appeared in football—Duke to the Rose Bowl and Clemson to the Cotton Bowl. Sam Snead began his meteoric rise in golf the year I became sports editor. Don Budge and Alice Marble were playing tennis and our local baseball team, the Charlotte Hornets, were winners. The Hornets provided an interesting sidelight. Our sports department conducted a letter-writing contest in those days, and the winner—the reader who composed the best letter—would make a week’s road trip with the Hornets and send back to the paper stories of all their games. The winner was not a mature veteran but a twelve-year-old junior high school student—Charles Kuralt. So far as I know it was his first professional trip anywhere.

Moving from sports to politics, I used some of the same methods. In ignorance of the field, I was prone to ask simple questions and again received some surprising answers. I once interviewed a Charlotte Congressman who was

noted for the fact that he had never uttered a memorable opinion. We talked at length and I used on him what became a favorite tactic, simply remaining quiet most of the time, and the subject talked to fill in the embarrassing silence. The Congressman actually took a stand on some issue of the day and I quoted him in the newspaper. This was regarded as a good news story for the day, but the Congressman was furious. “Dammitall, Davis,” he said, “you know that’s a controversial issue and I’ve got to run for office next year—you know I can’t comment on nothing like that.”

I recall asking Governor Gregg Cherry in an interview if he approved of a two-party system, which was then a hot issue in state politics. “Hell, no,” he said. “Do you realize I have to make three or four trips up in the mountains during a campaign, just to keep those counties straight? Do you know there’s 300,000 of those devils registered in the state? We can’t do a thing in Raleigh without them yapping at us.”

I covered the nominating conventions of Eisenhower and Stevenson in two successive elections and was assigned to follow Ike through the Carolinas during his first race. He gave reporters quite a few laughs. One of the General’s aides had given him a 2×4 timber to use as a prop to attack the Democrats on the issue of inflation. The timber had been carefully sawn almost entirely in two in three different places. Ike was instructed to hold up the whole piece of wood and say, “This was the value of a dollar when Franklin Roosevelt took office.”

He was then to snap off one end of the timber and say, “And this was the value of a dollar when Harry Truman took office.” Another snap of the 2×4 and Ike was expected to cry in triumph, “And *this* is the value of a dollar today.”

Somehow, the General couldn’t get it right. He held up the wooden prop and yelled to a crowd in Winston-Salem, “This was the value of a dollar when Truman. . . .” His face fell as he realized he had muffed his opportunity and the point was lost. He repeated the error in a crowded stadium in Charlotte. I’m not sure that other reporters peached on Ike, but *Charlotte News* readers got the truth. It didn’t seem to matter. Ike won in a landslide anyway—twice in a row.

In something of the same spirit, I began my writing about the Civil War—not to oversimplify or undercomplicate the matter, I began once more in ignorance of my subject. My first real interest in the war came from reading Dr. Douglas S. Freeman. The three volumes of his *Lee’s Lieutenants* made my hair stand on end—I had no previous idea of the fascination hidden within the

vast lore of that turbulent time. But when rereading Dr. Freeman I noticed that many of his most appealing stories were buried in the footnotes, and I concluded that all the more serious historians must relegate such material to their notes. So I began reading the footnotes straight through and then literally read Freeman's bibliography. Of course no one could have read every word. I developed a sense something like that of a wildcat oil prospector—you drill and if interesting bubbles appear, you read further. I began to assemble a mass of interesting material, what used to be called human-interest stories, and found such material to be most useful in portraying the personalities of officers and men of the Civil War period. The tyro writer works under great disadvantages, of course, but in this method there was one virtue—as I studied this new material with a growing sense of discovery, my excitement and the fresh impressions made upon a newcomer were communicated to the reader.

In trying to write in more vivid human terms, I never stopped to consider my audience. It never occurred to me that scholars might read books like these. I merely wrote for myself, much as most cooks do their cooking by taste.

Perhaps it would shed some light on my methods if I described the writing of some Civil War book—for example, *To Appomattox*. The first problem was that this was a familiar tale—a quite familiar one since Bruce Catton had recently published *A Stillness at Appomattox*. But that book was chiefly the story of the Union armies involved—and in addition I had a different idea in mind: to blend a chorus of voices, of eye-witnesses only, which would tell the story of the death of Lee's army with some eloquence but above all with an impressive air of authenticity.

So I assembled hundreds of contemporary accounts, all eye-witnesses who were with the armies or were caught in their paths—or those who were back home in Richmond or Petersburg. I divided these accounts by chronology into nine days, from the fall of Richmond on April 1, 1865, to the surrender at Appomattox on April 9. Each participant's account was divided into the appropriate number of days and filed in my thick and growing files. Then the whole retreat and pursuit were outlined on the walls of my work room. Using sheets of typing paper pasted together, I hung the entries, day by day, around the entire room. The shortest of these hanging pages reached from ceiling to floor and longer ones were rolled at the bottom into thick rolls.

Each entry—usually a single line—gave the name of the witness, a capsule description of the material, and its source. I then divided each day into four categories: "The Flight," for the Confederate Army; "The Pursuit," for the Union troops; and two categories for people back home in the rear of the armies. These included President Jefferson Davis in flight with his cabinet, and President Lincoln and his party down from Washington to be in at the kill.

Following the numerous entries in sequence, in chronological order, I wrote

my way through this extensive outline. But there were also aesthetic problems involved. I tried to synthesize all these disparate voices into an intelligible narrative in which the reader wouldn't be lost. I also sought to use some of the techniques of fiction—to keep a taut story line, resisting the impulse to tell too much at once—to assure the reader that there was much more to come. I used conversations where the material permitted them and tried to include all possible sensual details—I mean sensual in the literal sense: the look of the countryside; the weather by day and night (the U.S. Weather Bureau Station in Asheville has records of weather in most parts of the U.S. for many years past—back to Adam and Eve, it seemed to me); the clothing of the participants; their food or lack of it (sometimes the hungry Confederates scratched in the earth hoping to find grains of corn where horses had been fed); and all the sights, sounds, and smells of war that could be found: tales of dead horses and men strewn along the route; of burning wagons and the neighing and thrashing of terrified draft horses; the stories of women and children amidst the flames of burning Richmond. And in odd juxtaposition were tales of humor—like the spectacle of a boy soldier escaping with a ham impaled on his bayonet, all the while being beaten by an outraged black servant.

I consciously thought that these scenes should be depicted just as they might be by a movie camera. When I read the book through at last it seemed to me—of course I was highly prejudiced and I'm this book's best friend—but it seemed to be a truly new story, vivid and fresh, as if all these hundreds of people had been freed to speak for the first time.

The book had luck. It was a selection of the Literary Guild and won the Mayflower Cup. And, briefly, it led me to believe that fame and fortune were knocking. The *Encyclopedia Britannica* sent a rather fulsome letter saying something like this: "The editors of the *Encyclopedia Britannica* invite you to join that august company of scholars who have, over two centuries, contributed to the most celebrated depository of knowledge in the English language"—something like that, as I recall it thirty years later.

What they wanted was a rewrite of the *Britannica* entry on Appomattox. I supposed they meant the campaign and a lengthy essay—but they had in mind the entry on Appomattox, Virginia, only about an inch long, comprising about three or four sentences. So I labored to distill all my hard-won wisdom onto the head of a pin; and in return I received a small certificate and a check for \$3.

Well, that's a general idea of my dealings with my seven books on the Civil War. There were many others on diverse topics, but with few exceptions these books on that war are the only ones remaining in print—some of them for about thirty-five years. I believe the other books were as well written but

all had shorter lives, proving, apparently, that it was the subject, and not the writer, that gave the Civil War books their longevity.

I once had a useful memory and boundless energy and perhaps they helped me, though I wrote far too many books. I tried, as I aged, to become more dispassionate—so much so that my wife, Judy, says I sometimes write like a Yankee sympathizer.

As we were enjoined by Skipper Coffin long ago, I have tried not to take myself too seriously—just an old sportswriter—feature writer—investigative reporter, interviewing after a fashion a few hundred of those fascinating people of the Civil War and other wars.

I stayed at it almost literally day and night for about forty years. My report as a survivor is that much of it was enjoyable, but the effort wore me out. After I retired from writing some friends asked me why, and I explained that I was losing my marbles. They made polite protests until I tried a more graphic explanation. “Every morning when I lean over to tie my shoes,” I said, “I lose fifty to a hundred marbles on each shoe. They roll across the floor and disappear in the corners.” They laugh, but anyone could grasp what they are thinking: “Yep, the old coot is over the hill all right.”

I now lead a marvelous life with Judy, a remarkable woman and companion who practically wrote the last couple of books that bear my name—translating my text into English, limning characters and helping to establish relationships between them. She gave those books the old-fashioned unity, coherence, and emphasis that Miss Rena Cole tried to teach me in high school.

Judy’s full of good humor, is never at a loss for words—so it’s hopeless for me to try to get the better of her. She’s a great conversationalist and the unchallenged Free World Champion compiler of Honey-Do lists. She must have been a founder of the Gregarian Society of North America. I love her dearly for more reasons than I can enumerate.

Theoretically we are living out our days busily trying to landscape our little mountain top in Southwest Virginia and grow vegetables. In reality our routine is about like this: in the morning we tear up the cabin searching for something one of us has lost. In the afternoon, usually after our naps, we wonder for hours what in hell all that tarryhooting before lunch was all about.

This evening, of course, has been a great pleasure for me. I’m deeply appreciative of the honor paid me by the North Caroliniana Society—and no less so for the presence of you wonderful people who have come to help make this occasion memorable for us. Thank you and God bless you.





A Burke Davis Bibliography, 1930–1990

Burke Davis and Robert G. Anthony, Jr.

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Chartered by the Secretary of State on 11 September 1975 as a private nonprofit corporation under provisions of Chapter 55A of the *General Statutes of North Carolina*, the North Caroliniana Society is dedicated to the promotion of increased knowledge and appreciation of North Carolina's heritage. This it accomplishes in a variety of ways: encouragement of scholarly research and writing in and the teaching of state and local history; publication of documentary materials, including the numbered, limited-edition *North Caroliniana Society Imprints* and *North Caroliniana Society Keepsakes*; sponsorship of professional and lay conferences, seminars, lectures, and exhibitions; commemoration of historic events, including sponsorship of markers and plaques; and assistance to the North Carolina Collection and North Carolina Collection Gallery of the University of North Carolina Library and other cultural organizations, such as the Friends of the Library, the Friends of the Archives, the North Carolina Literary and Historical Association, the Historic Preservation Foundation of North Carolina, and the North Carolina Writers Conference.

Incorporated by H. G. Jones, William S. Powell, and Louis M. Connor, Jr., who soon were joined by a distinguished group of North Carolinians, the Society was limited to one hundred members for its first decade. However, it does elect from time to time additional individuals meeting its strict criterion of "adjudged performance" in service to their state's culture—i.e., those who have demonstrated a continuing interest in and support of the historical, literary, and cultural heritage of North Carolina. The Society, a tax-exempt organization under provisions of Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code, expects service rather than dues. For its programs, it depends upon the contributions, bequests, and devises of its members and friends. Its IRS number is 56-1119848. Upon request, contributions to the Society may be counted toward membership in the Chancellors' Club. The Society administers the Archie K. Davis Fund, given in 1987 by the Research Triangle Foundation in honor of its retiring board chairman and the Society's longtime president.

A highlight of the Society's year is the presentation of the North Caroliniana Society Award for long and distinguished service in the encouragement, production, enhancement, promotion and preservation of North Caroliniana. Starting with Paul Green, the Society has recognized Tar Heels such as Albert Coates, Sam J. Ervin, Jr., Sam Ragan, Gertrude S. Carraway, John Fries Blair, William and Ida Friday, William S. Powell, Mary and James Semans, David Stick, William M. Cochrane, Emma Neal Morrison, and Burke Davis. The proceedings of the awards banquets, published in the *Imprints* series, furnish rare glimpses into the lives of those recognized.

The Society has its headquarters in the North Carolina Collection, the "Conscience of North Carolina," which seeks to preserve for present and future generations all that has been or is published by North Carolinians regardless of subject and about North Carolina and North Carolinians regardless of author or source. In this mission the Collection's clientele is far broader than the University community; indeed, it is the entire citizenry of North Carolina, as well as those outside the state whose research extends to North Carolina or North Carolinians. Members of the North Caroliniana Society share a very special relationship to this unique Collection that dates back to 1844 and stands unchallenged as the largest and most comprehensive repository in America of published materials about a single state. The North Carolina Collection Gallery, opened in 1988, adds exhibition and interpretive dimensions to the Collection's traditional services. These combined resources fulfill the vision of President David L. Swain (1801-1868), who founded the Collection; Librarian Louis Round Wilson (1876-1979), who nurtured it; and Philanthropist John Sprunt Hill (1869-1961), who generously endowed it. All North Carolinians are enriched by this precious legacy.

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